

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARGARET MARKS:

A CONTRIBUTION TO A SURVEY OF LIFE AND STRUCTURES ON THE COMSTOCK

Interviewee: Margaret Marks

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Description

Margaret Louise Kelley Marks was born in Butte, Montana, on February 5, 1918. During her childhood she traveled with her family from mining camp to mining camp until they finally came to Virginia City, Nevada. She graduated from high school in Virginia City, and was a member of the last class to graduate from the Fourth Ward School. She then studied nursing in Butte, Montana, became a registered nurse, and returned to Nevada to work at Saint Mary's Hospital in Reno. During the Second World War she married William Leslie Marks, and since the end of the war and William's return to Nevada they have lived in Virginia City. Today Margaret assists her husband in running and operating the Crystal Bar in Virginia City.

Mrs. Marks is descended from some of Nevada's earliest settlers, tracing her family roots back to 1857 on the Comstock and to the 1860s in the Reno area. In her oral history she recounts her family's history, discussing the occupational background of her father, John Kelley, a man involved with the mining industry most of his life, typically traveling from mining camp to mining camp. Mrs. Marks also shares her memories of her mother, Mable Mary Powers, a woman who grew up on the Comstock during its early days. Mable Powers was acquainted with such early Comstockers as Dan De Quille and Albert Michelson. These impressions, along with others of the early Comstock which were told to Margaret, are included in this oral history.

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LIFE AND STRUCTURES ON THE COMSTOCK**

PREPARED FOR THE STOREY COUNTY, NEVADA
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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An Oral History Conducted by Ann Harvey
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University of Nevada Oral History Program

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PREFACE TO THE DIGITAL EDITION

Established in 1964, the University of Nevada Oral History Program (UNOHP) explores the remembered past through rigorous oral history interviewing, creating a record for present and future researchers. The program's collection of primary source oral histories is an important body of information about significant events, people, places, and activities in twentieth and twenty-first century Nevada and the West.

The UNOHP wishes to make the information in its oral histories accessible to a broad range of patrons. To achieve this goal, its transcripts must speak with an intelligible voice. However, no type font contains symbols for physical gestures and vocal modulations which are integral parts of verbal communication. When human speech is represented in print, stripped of these signals, the result can be a morass of seemingly tangled syntax and incomplete sentences—totally verbatim transcripts sometimes verge on incoherence. Therefore, this transcript has been lightly edited.

While taking great pains not to alter meaning in any way, the editor may have removed false starts, redundancies, and the “uhs,” “ahs,” and other noises with which speech is often liberally sprinkled; compressed some passages which, in unaltered form, misrepresent the chronicler's meaning; and relocated some material to place information in its intended context. Laughter is represented with [laughter] at the end of a sentence in which it occurs, and ellipses are used to indicate that a statement has been interrupted or is incomplete...or that there is a pause for dramatic effect.

As with all of our oral histories, while we can vouch for the authenticity of the interviews in the UNOHP collection, we advise readers to keep in mind that these are remembered pasts, and we do not claim that the recollections are entirely free of error. We can state, however, that the transcripts accurately reflect the oral history recordings on which they were based. Accordingly, each transcript should be approached with the

same prudence that the intelligent reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries, and other sources of historical information. All statements made here constitute the remembrance or opinions of the individuals who were interviewed, and not the opinions of the UNOHP.

In order to standardize the design of all UNOHP transcripts for the online database, most have been reformatted, a process that was completed in 2012. This document may therefore differ in appearance and pagination from earlier printed versions. Rather than compile entirely new indexes for each volume, the UNOHP has made each transcript fully searchable electronically. If a previous version of this volume existed, its original index has been appended to this document for reference only. A link to the entire catalog can be found online at <http://oralhistory.unr.edu/>.

For more information on the UNOHP or any of its publications, please contact the University of Nevada Oral History Program at Mail Stop 0324, University of Nevada, Reno, NV, 89557-0324 or by calling 775/784-6932.

Alicia Barber
Director, UNOHP
July 2012

ORIGINAL PREFACE

The University of Nevada Oral History Program (OHP) engages in systematic interviewing of persons who can provide firsthand descriptions of events, people and places that give history its substance. The products of this research are the tapes of the interviews and their transcriptions.

In themselves, oral history interviews are not history. However, they often contain valuable primary source material, as useful in the process of historiographical synthesization as the written sources to which historians have customarily turned. Verifying the accuracy of all of the statements made in the course of an interview would require more time and money than the OHP's operating budget permits. The program can vouch that the statements were made, but it cannot attest that they are free of error. Accordingly, oral histories should be read with the same prudence that the reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries and other sources of historical information.

It is the policy of the OHP to produce transcripts that are as close to verbatim as

possible, but some alteration of the text is generally both unavoidable and desirable. Then human speech is captured in print the result can be a morass of tangled syntax, false starts and incomplete sentences, sometimes verging on incoherency. The type font contains no symbols for the physical gestures and the diverse vocal modulations that are integral parts of communication through speech. Experience shows that totally verbatim transcripts are often totally unreadable and therefore a total waste of the resources expended in their production. While keeping alterations to a minimum the OHP will, in preparing a text:

- a. generally delete false starts, redundancies and the uhs, ahs and other noises with which speech is often liberally sprinkled;

- b. occasionally compress language that would be confusing to the reader in unaltered form;

- c. rarely shift a portion of a transcript to place it in its proper context; and

- d. enclose in [brackets] explanatory information or words that were not uttered

but have been added to render the text intelligible.

There will be readers who prefer to take their oral history straight, without even the minimal editing that occurred in the production of this text; they are directed to the tape recording.

Copies of all or part of this work and the tape recording from which it is derived are available from:

The University of Nevada
Oral History Program
Mailstop 0324
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(775) 784-6932

INTRODUCTION

Margaret Louise Kelley Marks was born in Butte, Montana, on 5 February 1918. During her childhood she traveled with her family from mining camp to mining camp until they finally came to Virginia City, Nevada. She graduated from high school in Virginia City, and was a member of the last class to graduate from the Fourth Ward School. She then studied nursing in Butte, Montana, became a registered nurse, and returned to Nevada to work at St. Mary's Hospital in Reno. During the Second World War she married William Leslie Marks, and since the end of the war and William's return to Nevada they have lived in Virginia City. Although Mrs. Marks only makes passing reference to her nursing activities in Virginia City, her neighbors report that on numerous occasions through the years she selflessly rendered medical assistance to individuals during times of crisis. Today Margaret assists her husband in running and operating the Crystal Bar in Virginia City.

Mrs. Marks is descended from some of Nevada's earliest settlers, tracing her family

roots back to 1857 on the Comstock and to the 1860s in the Reno area. As such, her family's history mirrors much of the history of Nevada. In her oral history she recounts her family's history, discussing the occupational background of her father, John Kelley, a man involved with the mining industry most of his life, typically traveling from mining camp to mining camp. Mrs. Marks also shares her memories of her mother, Mable Mary Powers, a woman who grew up on the Comstock during its early days. Mable Powers was acquainted with such early Comstockers as Dan De Quille and Albert Michelson. These impressions, along with others of the early Comstock which were told to Margaret, are included in this oral history.



MARGARET MARKS, 1984

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARGARET MARKS

Margaret Marks: My name is Margaret Louise Kelley Marks. I was born in Butte, Montana, on 5 February 1918. I was born in my parents' home. [I was delivered by] Dr. McCrimmin and my grandmother assisted him—she was a practical nurse. My father was John Henry Kelley. My mother was Mabel Mary Powers Kelley. I had one sister, Mabel Kelley Murray.

Ann Harvey: Who was the first member of your father's family to move to the Nevada area?

My father's father, John Kelley, first came to the Nevada area in about 1866. He came to Glendale which is outside of Reno and then later moved into Reno around the Wedekind Road area. He and a brother owned a ranch there called the Kelley ranch. It later became the Kelley-Sullivan ranch. The Kelley-Sullivan ditch was named after them.

Where did your grandfather come from?

He came from Boston, Massachusetts. He and my grandmother, Margaret McGuire Kelley, went to St. Louis, and [then] from St. Louis they went to Glendale. On the way to Nevada [probably in St. Louis] they had 2 children. One was Ann Kelley and the other was Peter J. Kelley.

Where was your father born?

In Crescent Mills, California. The reason he was born there was [that after] my grandfather and his brother came to Nevada and had the ranch together my grandfather was killed. One night in March of 1868 he went to Lake's Crossing to pick up some supplies and on the way down or on the way back he was killed. My grandmother did not get along well with his brother, Pat Kelley, and so she went to live with her sister in Crescent Mills, California. That's where my father was born.

What did your grandmother do in Crescent Mills after they arrived?

She was the first telegraph operator in Crescent Mills. Then she became a housekeeper for a man named Frank Kruger who was the owner of the Green Mountain mine in Crescent Mills. Later she married this man and had 2 children: Tillie Kruger and Frank Kruger. Tillie Kruger was an early graduate of the University of Nevada and during her years at the university she lived with the McCarran family—Pat McCarran and she were in the same class, and they were on the debate team together.

Could you tell us something about your grandmother's second husband, Frank Kruger?

Yes. In Crescent Mills he had the original land grant for the city of Greenville, California. It was presented to him by President Hayes. He did ranching in the early days there. My grandmother died in 1884 in childbirth.

Was that a common cause of death among women at that time?

It was. We visited the cemetery over there and [found that] where my grandmother was buried my step-grandfather put up a headstone that said on it: "The golden cup is broken." That was kind of interesting.

When did your mother's father first move to Nevada?

My mother's father, Michael T. Powers, first came in 1857 with 2 brothers from Canada. One was Levitt and the other was Lawrence. They settled in Silver City. I think they were probably on their way to California and just stopped off [here]. They were miners and they stayed for a few years. The two older brothers stayed on, but my grandfather went back to Canada and married my grandmother,

Hannah Sullivan Powers. She was 16 years old and that was in 1875. Then they came directly to Silver City.

Do you know anything about your grandmother's family in Canada?

Yes, a little. My great-grandmother's name was Mary Higgins Sullivan, and my great-grandfather's name was Thomas Sullivan. My grandmother was the youngest of 13 children. They were farmers, and they lived in a little town outside of Montreal called St. Annisette.

When your grandfather brought your grandmother back to Nevada where did they go?

They came to Silver City because that's where he had been before, and that's where his brothers were at the time. My mother was born the following year in 1876.

Is there anything that you know about your grandfather you would like to share with us?

Because he came so early he knew all those early people. He would have known Comstock and I'm sure that he probably knew the Grosh brothers, too. My mother [used] to tell me a story [about] when she was a little girl and played on the steps of the Grosh cabin. I'm not sure about where that actually was, but I think it was probably in a ravine across the street from where the Donovan mill is because that was where her aunt's boardinghouse was.

What was the name of her aunt's boardinghouse?

Page's Boardinghouse. Her aunt's name was Mary Page, and her husband was George Page. He was the water tender for the Virginia City Water Company. He walked the flumes,

repaired all the breaks in the flumes and things like that. He died in 1910.

Could you describe Page's Boardinghouse?

The boardinghouse was a great big 2-storey place. I can't remember exactly what color it was. Those boardinghouses were torn down when I was pretty young, so I can't really remember too much about them. There was one next door, too, that Miss La Crutz had. She was French.

Could you tell us something about your father?

My father's full name was John Henry Kelley. He was born in Crescent Mills, California, on 8 September 1868. He went to school in Greenville, California, because after he was born his mother and stepfather moved there. They had this land grant and ranch where the city of Greenville is now. They sold off part of it, and [after that] there was more building in Greenville, so that's where he went to school.

How many years of schooling did your father have?

I don't know if he graduated from high school or not.

Could you tell me about some of your father's occupations?

The first occupation I know anything about was his job as a locator for Stanford and Lane in San Francisco. His job was to go out with another man—a partner—and check out mines. Stanford and Lane had a great deal of money they were [investing] into different mines, and if the mines weren't any good they didn't want to put their money into it. So they

had to know if these mines were salted or what. Do you know anything about salting mines?

Why don't you explain it to me?

Well people used to load ore into shotguns and shoot it into the walls of a mine. So they [Stanford and Lane] had to be sure that the ore was truly there and not just shot into the walls by somebody. [A locator] made sure that the mines were true mines and that the ore was good.

When did your father work for Stanford and Lane?

Around 1900. He was one of the first people to go to Goldfield.

Was he a miner in Goldfield?

No. He went there as a locator for Stanford and Lane and checked out the mines. He also did a little mining for himself on the side. He and this partner took over the Black Hawk mine in Goldfield.

What was the name of your father's partner in Goldfield?

His name was Ned Davis. He was a San Franciscan, and he owned the Ramona Hotel which was a famous hotel in San Francisco before the earthquake.

Whatever became of Mr. Davis?

After the earthquake—my dad and Mr. Davis were in San Francisco at the time of the earthquake—the Ramona was just leveled so he never rebuilt it. But he continued to live in San Francisco. I saw him in the late 1930s,

and then I guess he probably died in San Francisco.

So your father survived the San Francisco earthquake?

Yes, he did. He said it was terrible...the fires, the plundering and the robbing was awful. He said one of the worst things he saw was a lady lying on the street. She had been hit by some bricks. Well; this man came along, [saw] a large ring on her finger, hacked her finger off and took the ring and ran away. My father tried to stop him, but he was gone.

What did your father do between his time in Goldfield in 1901 and the San Francisco earthquake in 1906?

That was when he did a lot of locating. He moved from one place to another. Incidentally, he and Tex Rickard became good friends in Goldfield, and he saw the Nelson-Gans fight.

He did!

Yes.

Did he ever tell you anything about the fight?

Just that it was an awful long fight. [laughter]

Who was Tex Rickard?

Tex Rickard was the owner of the Northern Saloon. He was also a promoter, and he was the man who promoted the fight.

Incidentally, he had a very interesting outhouse at his home in Goldfield—and I really have to tell you about it because it's the only one I've ever seen in Nevada that was a three-holer and was made of brick. It was

really interesting. [Later] some people bought his house, and they tore it down, but it was a landmark in Goldfield. It was beautiful for an outhouse! [laughter]

Tex Rickard was a very interesting man. During the early career of Jack Dempsey he promoted all of his fights. I've seen pictures of him. He didn't look like he was a real big man to me, but I guess he was a big man in a lot of ways.

How old was your father during this time?

He was born in 1868, so in 1900 he would have been 32 years old.

Did he tell you any other stories about his experiences as a locator?

Well, he told me one story about going to the Salton Sink which was around the Salton Sea in southern California. He said that at that time not too many people had gone through there. Well, he and Ned Davis were looking for some claims down there and saw tarantulas that were so huge they were as big as a man's hand. He said that they were really interesting, and that they had these holes they would crawl into with trap doors on them—just like you'd open the door to your house—and then they would go in and down would go the trap door.

He said there were many interesting things down there. He said where the sea apparently had been in the sink where they were—they could dig around and find different things like stones and rocks and little prehistoric fish.

What did your father do after he was a locator?

Then my father came to Silver City in about 1910, and he worked there. I don't know exactly where he worked, but he was down

there and he married my mother in 1910. They were married in Reno at the Golden Hotel. Then they went back to live in Silver City. In 1912 my sister was born, and they lived there for a couple of years. Then my dad went to Butte, Montana, to do some work on the Original mine shaft. They had been having a lot of trouble with the shafts, and he had done timber work before, so he went to work on their shaft in the Original mine in Butte. While he was there he had a problem. He fell in the shaft and broke one of his legs. He was pretty badly banged up, but they continued to live there, and that was where I was born.

You were born in Butte, Montana?

Yes.

Was your father a miner in Butte when you were born?

Yes, he was because you could call a shaft man a miner.

Did your father work on square-set timbering?

Yes. He sure did. My dad built many models of square-sets—in fact he was an expert on square-setting. He did a lot of carpentry, too—a lot of cabinet making—and he did a great deal of work in square-setting.

About how long were your parents in Butte?

Well, they were there about 6 years...until I was 3 years old, and then they went to Fallon. There was an oil boom there. My dad built a house there, and we planned to stay, but the oil boom turned out to be not such a good oil boom. [laughter] From there we went to Oakland, California. I don't know what my dad did down there because I was just a little

tiny kid, and I don't remember. Then we moved to Virginia City when I was about 4 years old. We lived next door to the Fourth Ward School.

What did your father do when he came back to Virginia City?

He went to work at the American Flat mill. They were building the mill then, so he worked on the building of the mill. He continued to work there until they dismantled the mill which was in 1927. The mill was too big, and they didn't have enough ore for it, so they decided to move it to Miami, Arizona. They took it down piece by piece to move it, and then they rebuilt it in Miami—but they converted it to copper.

What did your father do at the American Flat mill when he worked there?

They built these great big tanks, and that is probably what he did. He probably worked on the building of the mill, too. But they built these great tanks, and they were so large that every time they finished one they had a big party down there and a dance.

Do you remember the names of any of the men your father worked with?

One of the men—a very interesting man—was Roy Morrison. During the building of the United Comstock mill at American Flat he took pictures of the mill as it progressed. A few years ago he came to Virginia City, and brought these pictures and gave them to me. They are very interesting.

What did your father do after the American Flat mill was moved?

He went to Arizona and worked in the mill there. But he didn't like Arizona, so he decided to go back to Montana. So we went to Montana then.

What did your father do in Montana?

He worked in the Mountain-Con mine there. He did carpentry work for them.

Did your father leave Montana?

Yes. He came back to Virginia City again in 1932 and went to work for the Con-Chollar mill located in lower Gold Hill. He did carpentry work there.

What political party did your father belong to, and did he ever belong to a social club?

He was a Republican. He was baptized a Catholic, but he later became a Mason in Greenville, California. So I guess he never followed the Catholic religion. Here in Virginia City he belonged to the Escorial Lodge No. 1 [of the Masonic Order.]

Now I would like to talk about your mother. When and where was your mother born?

My mother, Mabel Powers Kelley, was born in Silver City, 26 February 1876.

Was she born at home?

Oh, yes.

Do you know the location?

Yes, I do because the house is still there that she was born in. It was on a corner one block north of the main street going through Silver City.

Could you describe the structure?

Well, in my recollection it was a little brown house. Something strange was that my sister was born in the house across the street from there. It was a very small house because there was very little housing available in Silver City when my sister was born.

Were these houses near a large building we could use to locate them?

There's a bar on the corner of the main street, and you just go up the hill. It was the bar that Pat Staub had.

Who was Pat Staub?

He was kind of a character who came to Silver City not too many years ago. He was an interesting guy. He had lived somewhere in Kansas. He loved circuses. He went to visit [one once, and in the circus he saw this very lovely young trapeze performer. Well, he decided that that was for him, so he married her and brought her to Silver City. When she passed away he went back to Kansas.

When my mother was 2 years old my grandparents moved to Virginia City where her brother was born. His name was Albert Powers.

Where did your mother live in Virginia City?

When she first moved up here she lived down below C Street somewhere close to Chinatown. That would be probably around E Street or F Street close to Taylor Street.

Did your mother ever recount to you any stories about the Chinese people that she observed while growing up?

Only that they were here and that they used to go to a Chinese restaurant and that they bought from the Chinese stores.

Where did your mother go to school?

She went to St. Mary's convent which was down on Washington Street, and then she also went to the Fourth Ward School.

How old was your mother when she went to St. Mary's convent school?

She started school there when she was 6, and then she went to the Fourth Ward when she was in about the fourth grade.

Did she ever tell you any stories about the sisters who ran the convent school?

Yes. They were very nice. She said that they used to embroider pictures. Some of them are now in St. Mary's church. She embroidered beautifully.

How long did your mother go to the Fourth Ward School?

Through the eighth grade.

Did she ever recount to you any of her experiences at the Fourth Ward School?

She told me about some of the kids that were in a class with her. There was Joe Farnsworth, who later became state printer; Wyman Evans, who was in charge of the Virginia City Water Company for many years and then later of Sierra Pacific Power; and Richard Kirman, who was later the governor of Nevada.

Did your mother ever tell you any stories about her childhood in Virginia City?

Yes, she did. She told me that when she lived on Howard Street just off Sutton Avenue the family who lived next door to them were the Michelsons. She was about 6 years old then. Their son was Albert Michelson and she always told me, "Little girls get crushes on big boys." She said, "I really had a crush on Albert Michelson." In later years I saw Albert Michelson. He came to visit her in the early 1920s. I didn't know too much about him then, but later on she told me stories about him. He was the first appointee to the Naval Academy from Nevada, and he had been the first man to measure the speed of light, and was the first Nobel Prize winner in the United States.

She lived in a pretty impressive neighborhood!

Yes, she did. [laughter]

When did your mother move to this house on Howard Street?

She must have moved there when she was about 6 years old.

Did your mother ever tell you any other stories about her childhood?

Yes, she did. She said that they had lived across the street from the courthouse when she was 4 years old, and that there were 2 men who were apparently bad friends. They both worked in a mine, and one of them threw the other man down a shaft. The police then picked him up and put him in jail. [Well] when they were little children they were peeking out the window and [saw] a mob that was going to lynch this man. She said that they took the man out the back door of the courthouse and spirited him away to Carson City. [The man who took him there]

was a friend of their family. His name was Charles Thirwell. He said he was just scared to death with that guy in the horse and buggy. [laughter]

She also told me that she remembered Dan De Quille. She said he was a little tiny guy who always carried a black umbrella, was very polite and was always nice to the kids. She thought he was a real nice little guy. He was the editor of the *Territorial Enterprise*, [and the author of *The Big Bonanza*].

Are there other stories you have about your mother?

My grandmother told me one once. I asked her about Eilley Orrum Bowers, and she said, "Oh, yes I knew her. She had a little house up on C Street, and people used to go there. She would tell their fortune with her crystal ball." And she said, "I went and I had my fortune told by her." [She told me that] at that time my mother was a year old, and Eilley Orrum told her that my mother was going to die when she was 2 years old. I guess my poor grandmother worried herself sick over it because she thought she was going to lose her little girl when she was 2. But my mother lived to be 78, so she was wrong. [laughter]

While your mother was going to the Fourth Ward School there was a family tragedy, wasn't there?

Yes. My grandfather worked at the C & C mine, and once they were blasting an area underground when the dynamite didn't go off. Well, my grandfather waited for a long time, but when he finally went in the dynamite went off, and my grandfather was blinded in 1884.

Were accidents common at the mines during the early Comstock?

Yes. They were.

What did your grandfather do after that?

Well, he just stayed home because he couldn't do anything really, and my grandmother ran a tamale factory for a while. She did it in her house. She used to make great tamales—wonderful ones.

Did she sell the tamales to the miners?

Yes. Then later she became a practical nurse.

And this was your grandmother Hannah Sullivan Powers?

Yes.

When your mother was through going to grammar school what did she do?

Well, she worked for a little while for a doctor in Virginia City and his wife. She did cooking for them.

Do you remember his name?

I can't think of it, but he was a doctor in Reno later on. He was up on C Street. His office and his house were in the same place. There is a mall there now, but when we were kids growing up John Terkla had a saloon and a restaurant in there.

How long did your mother work for the doctor?

She probably worked for him for [about] 10 years.

When did your mother marry your father?

In 1910. They were married in Reno at the Golden Hotel.

Now I'd like to start talking a little bit about your life. Could you tell me something about your childhood?

I was born in Butte, Montana, in 1918, [but soon] we moved to Fallon, then to Oakland, and we came back to Virginia City. I was between 3 and 4 years old then. I lived here until I was about 5½, and then my father took us to Butte again. Well, my father decided he didn't want to stay in Butte, so he left my sister and my grandmother there while my mother and I came back to Virginia City with him. So I started to school at the First Ward with Bill Marks.

Do you remember who the teacher was at the First Ward School?

Yes. She was Mrs. Katie Quirk, and she was wonderful! She was the nicest lady. I can see her yet she was so tall and thin. We just loved her. She was good to us, but before that she was kind of strict. [laughter]

Do you remember what the First Ward School looked like?

I sure do. It was a great big old brown building, and it had 3 floors. It was really a big place.

Where was it located?

It was located at the north end of C Street—right at the very end.

Do you remember the names of any of the children who went to school with you?

Yes. There was Bill—my husband Bill—the Metae children, Nicky Hinch, Lilly Berry, Dorothy Antynovich, the Colletti boys, Hughie Gallagher and all kinds of kids. Some of us still live here.

Do you remember what you and your friends did when you weren't going to school?

We used to play kick the can, and we played bean bag...that was a great game for the school. That's where you toss the bag, and you have to catch it. If you didn't catch it, you were out.

How long did you go to the First Ward School?

I went to the first, second and part of the third grade there, and then my father moved to Arizona, so I went down there.

How long were you in Arizona?

About 6 months, and then back to Butte, Montana. I was in the fourth grade when we went there, and I was there until I was a freshman in high school. Then we came back to Virginia City, and I went to the Fourth Ward School. I graduated from high school there.

Do you remember the names of your high school teachers, and could you tell us something about them?

Yes, I remember them very well. They were wonderful. We had Katherine Ligon who is now Katherine Cantlon. She is married to Dr. Edmund Cantlon and lives in Reno. I see her often, and she is very nice. Then the other lady teacher we had was Helen Stark. Now she is Helen Aldaz. She was great and got us into athletics. We became even more

active in athletics with her than with Miss Ligon. We also had a very famous man [who taught us] known as John Gilmartin. He was a famous Nevada basketball player and quite a track star. Then there was the immortal Jake Lawlor—everybody knows about Jake Lawlor. He was really something. He was great—he really was. He was wonderful with the girls. I know he was a little rough on the boys sometimes, but with us he was terrific... except once when we were seniors and played hookey. We had gone to Dayton to sell some tickets for a dance, and when we came back he said, “Where were you yesterday?”

I looked at him and I thought, “I guess I have to tell the truth,” so I said, “Oh, I went to Dayton to sell some tickets.”

He said, “Well, that is fine. You can teach this class for the next week.

I said, “Oh, no!”

He said, “Oh, yes!”

So I said, “OK.”

He said, “You take your book home, and you get the assignments ready.” And he really made me do it! I’m telling you I never played hookey again! [laughter] But he was great. He was awfully good to us.

What class was that?

That was civics. No wonder I never got involved in politics! [laughter]

Can you remember some of the things that the teenagers did when you were going to high school at the Fourth Ward School?

Oh yes. Edna Hunt, Marcelle Clausen and I were the first cheerleaders Virginia City ever had. We thought we were so smart because they held the tournaments at the University of Nevada. We used to get all dressed up in these blue sweaters with a V on it and in these

blue skirts and tennis shoes, and we would go down there and go through our little act. We had fun; it was great! And then we had a lot of picnics, and we played basketball, volleyball and a little baseball—not the girls so much as the boys.

Did you ever paint the V on the side of the hill for Virginia City?

Yes. We did. The boys always did the painting. The girls just went along for the ride.

Where did the girls play basketball?

In the National Guard Hall—the boys played there, too.

Where did the teenagers hang out when you were growing up?

Well, the teenagers mostly went to the Crystal Bar because they had cokes and ice cream. The adults went there for drinks and liquor, but the kids went there, too. In the wintertime Bill Marks, Sr. —not my husband—had a big old potbellied stove, and the kids used to go in there to sit around the stove and keep warm. Then they also went to Jim and Rosie McDevitt’s which was the Old Timers Club.

Do you remember where the Old Timers Club was located?

It was located on the corner of Mill and C. It looked then much like it looks today, but it was brown. They have painted it white since then.

Were there many dances that the young people went to when you were in high school?

Yes. We had a lot of dances. In fact we used to have school dances and then they used to have dances quite often in the National Guard Hall. They lasted a long time. They would start at 9:00, and they would go sometimes till 6:00 in the morning. But you never got tired because the floor in the National Guard was on springs. You could dance all night.

Do you remember what the old National Guard Hall looked like?

Yes, I do. They had a stage in the back, and they used to show movies there. You would walk in and go down some stairs to a little booth where they took your tickets for the movie. Then you walked down some more stairs and there were the dressing rooms in the back: the girls' dressing rooms and the boys' dressing rooms. Then if you went through some doors that swung open you were in the hall. There was also a potbellied stove there which became famous because [during basketball games] when those boys found themselves in a little problem they would ram their opponents into that railing on the stove. Those poor guys—it really hurt. [laughter]

Do you remember any of the movies that you used to watch in the National Guard Hall?

Let's see...I remember one, *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine*, and...*Rose Marie* was another one.

What period are we talking about?

We are talking about my high school years from about 1932 to 1936.

While you were in high school did you belong to any social clubs, school clubs or charitable organizations?

We had the GAA. And 2 of the girls who taught us, Katherine Ligon and Helen Stark, were recent graduates from the university. Well, they were very active in everything with the university, so they would take us down quite a bit. We would go down for GAA, Pan Hellenic and all kinds of things. It was fun. We had a good time.

Do you remember the names of any of your friends in high school?

Oh, yes. Like I said there was Edna Hunt and Marcelle Clausen who were cheerleaders with me, and Lola McCarthy, the Lewis girls, Jessie Dick, Marie Colletti, Francis Davis, Joyce Chambers, John Zalac, Buzz Meacham and Bill Marks—he doesn't want me to forget him. [laughter]

When you were going to high school what classes did you take?

I always wanted to be a nurse, and I tried to figure out something that I could take. But Virginia City was a small school and it was kind of hard because they didn't give everything, so I took more of a generalized course. But then when I decided I really wanted to become a nurse I had a little problem because I had to pick up chemistry and other things.. .but it was OK.

Did you graduate from high school in Virginia City?

I did. Bill and I were in the last class to graduate from the Fourth Ward School in Virginia City. There were 7 in our graduating class. We graduated in 1936 and, I guess, we were so awful they closed the school! [laughter]

When you graduated from high school what did you do?

About a month after I graduated my grandmother wanted to go to Butte, Montana. She was up in years, and she needed some company to go with her. So she invited me to go along and it went. [Well] she had some ideas in her head. She wanted me to be a nurse and my father didn't— he was very much against it. He wanted me to be a teacher. But while I was there she said, "Why don't you go to St. James, put your name in and see if you could qualify."

[I did and] I met this very nice lady who took all my credentials and worked with me. She said, "Well, I'll let you know," so I went home. Two weeks later I had an acceptance.

But then I got there and they found out I didn't have any chemistry. So they said, "Oh, my gosh. Here you are clear from Virginia City, Nevada. What are we going to do with you?"

I said, "I don't know. I hope you don't send me home."

So they said, "No, we're not going to do that." So I went to a Catholic high school and took a course in chemistry and I got the background that way. Then I graduated from the St. James Hospital School of Nursing in 1939.

What did you do after 1939?

I took my Montana State Board. Then I came back to Reno and went to St. Mary's. I thought I would like to work there. This was about a week before Christmas, and I said, "I'd like to come to work, but I'd like to wait until the first of the year."

On Christmas morning the phone rang, and I was asked, "Would you please come to St. Mary's because there isn't anyone to take care of the second floor?"

I almost died because I had never even been in the place, but I learned very quickly. [laughter] There was an orderly there who had been there a long time, so he kind of showed me the ropes. I worked there for 5 years.

So you were in Reno during the war years?

During the war years I was.

Did you ever come up to Virginia City during that time?

Oh, yes. Every now and then.

When the war was over what did you do?

Well, during the war—in 1942—Bill and I were married. Then after the war was over Bill came home from Europe and we moved back to Virginia City. This time I've been here for almost 40 years.

Do you and Mr. Marks have children?

Yes, we do. We have 3 girls. Our oldest daughter is Anne. She lives in Glendale. She's an office manager and a medical secretary for Dr. Lieb. He used to be in Reno at one time. Then we have Mary. She is married to Monte Vernon. She lives in Reno and works for Harrah's. Then we have Diane "Dee Dee" Paloolian. She teaches at the Virginia City High School.

When did you start raising your family?

Anne was born in 1946.

What was it like raising children here in Virginia City in the 1940s?

It was really rough. The silver mines were in very bad shape and we didn't have water

half the time—and in those days you didn't have disposable diapers! It was really bad. [When the pipes froze] every 2 or 3 days we would go to Carson and we would take a shower. Winter after winter that was the way we raised our 3 kids. Anyway, we weathered it all.

Does Virginia City have similar water problems today?

[No] because Curtis Wright was interested in acquiring some land out on the grade, and [they helped to put in a new water system].

Where was that to be located?

At what would be called "Louse Town"—about 6 miles from Virginia City as you would be going to Reno, but you would turn off and go into the valley like you were going down to Lagasino [Lagomarsino] Canyon. What Curtis Wright was going to do was to build planes or something. [They never finished their project] but they did put in the water system and that really saved us. But by that time my girls were all out of diapers, so all the bad days were over.

Where did your girls go to school?

They went to school in Virginia City. They went to the same school [Virginia City High School] all the way through high school.

Is that the school currently standing?

Yes, it is. It's not the old Fourth Ward because we were last there, but is the Virginia City High School today. Now we have another school—a new grammar school called the H. J. Gallagher Elementary School.

Do you remember some of your girls' teachers?

Well, Anne's teacher for 3 years was Doris Hansen. I remember Anne when she came home to get out of the third grade she said, "Mother, I just can't leave Mrs. Hansen because I've had her for 3 years!" But I have to tell you kind of a cute story about her. Anne came home one day when she was in the first grade or second grade and she said, "Mother, today is Mrs. Hansen's birthday."

And I said, "Isn't that lovely?"

Then she said, "Yes. And isn't she well preserved?" [laughter]

I don't know where she ever found that out, but I thought it was kind of a cute story. I told Mrs. Hansen and she said, "Gee, that makes me feel good." [laughter]

Someone told me that Walter Van Tilburg Clark taught at the Virginia City schools. Did your girls ever have him?

No, because my girls weren't in high school when he was here. He did teach in high school though, and my girls knew him really well. In fact, Walter Van Tilburg Clark and Barbara, his wife, became very good friends of mine because I was a nurse, and I did a great deal of work helping people here. We didn't have a doctor in Virginia City, so I spent about 20 years on the ambulance up here. An old doctor that was a friend of mine in Carson City used to say, "Marg, you come in on a wing and a prayer."

And I said, "I know it."

It was rough. The first ambulance [we had] in 1948 was an old converted army ambulance. Now they have beautiful ambulances and everything for them.

Do you remember any stories about Mr. Clark?

Yes, he was very interesting. In fact, he was doing a book when he died. His wife

wanted him to do a book on the Comstock. He never got very far into it because Barbara died first, and it was very hard for him. He was sick at the time, but he did do the Doten papers* and they are up at the University of Nevada now. Walt died before he could write his introduction, so his son Robert did that. So they are completed, and they're fantastic! They really are. Walt was an interesting man. His father had been the president of the university. He was a very nice man.

When did he live here?

He lived here 2 or 3 different times. The first time he lived here his children were small, and Babbs— his daughter—was in grammar school. Babbs is married to Ross Salmon today. Then he left here, went to the university and taught. Then from there he went to Montana and taught at Missoula. Finally he came back to the university again, but lived here. He was a real nice man, and his wife, Barbara, was nice, too.

Of course, Walter Van Tilburg Clark is a well-known author, but there have been so many artists in Virginia City. Could you tell me roughly when Virginia City became a place where artists liked to come?

About 1946. We had a couple of very interesting people come here from California. Two of them that I really remember were Lou Hughes—who did beautiful watercolors—and Lou Siegriest—who did watercolors and also oils. They were both very famous artists. Now, Lou Hughes came here and bought the building across the street from us—the Black building; and he lived there for quite a number of years, then went back to California. Then we also had a very famous artist who was almost a Nevada product himself— Cal

Bromund. Of course, everybody knows about Cal Bromund and his beautiful paintings. I have a little original of his that he highly prized. He loved to sing with Bill Marks; they used to sing together all the time. One time we were at his house and he said, “I have a little painting here. It’s kind of special to me.” And then he said, “Because you’re kind of special friends of mine I’d like you to have it.” It was a picture of his hideaway cabin. We still have it. We really prize it. It’s small, but to us it means a great deal more than the big ones do. It was really personal. Mae, his wife, was a delightful lady. It was a great loss when they both passed away.

When did they pass away?

Well, Mae died just a couple of years ago, and Cal died 4 or 5 years ago.

Do you remember any other visitors who came to Virginia City in the 1930s or 1940s?

Yes, I do. One especially. In 1939 we had the premiere of *Virginia City* here, and a number of movie stars came. There was Errol Flynn—he was the main character—and Miriam Hopkins ; she was also a main character. There was also Wallace Beery, Mae Robson, and none other than our president today—Ronald Reagan and Jane Wyman. I still remember them. They were unknowns then. He was making some cowboy pictures at that time. I remember they sat in the lot that’s across from the Delta—in those days it was the little Smokery—and I remember them sitting there and eating a box lunch on

*Clark, Walter Van Tilburg, ed. *The Journals of Alfred Doten, 1849-19 03*. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1973.

some makeshift benches someone had put in. It was kind of interesting.

Did you speak to them?

No, I didn't. I just saw them there, and they were kind of talking together. They seemed very interested in each other. [laughter]

Were the 1940s a transitional period for Virginia City?

Yes. They were. It was after World War II that Virginia City became more of a tourist attraction and people started coming. I think it was because many young men were stationed at Stead Air Force Base, which was then the Reno Army Air Corps base, and they used to come to Virginia City. Everyone was nice to them up here. I think Virginia City led the nation during the war in the number of boys who were in service. There were very few young men left here. I think that is one of the reasons people were so good to them. They were probably hoping their children would receive the same treatment wherever they were. So after the war lots of them came back because they loved Virginia City.

Were there people in town who were promoting tourism at this time?

Pretty much so. There was my father-in-law, Bill Marks. He had the idea that things should stay as they were—that they should keep Virginia City a historical town because it had a great history. There was also another man by the name of Paul Smith who promoted Virginia City. He had postcards printed up that said, "See Virginia City" and all this. He had a place called the Museum of Memories.

Where was that located?

The first one was up where the post office is now in the Marye building, and then later he moved it down to the corner of Union and C streets. That building is now part of the Bucket of Blood.

Was there anything happening in the 1950s or 1960s that you would like to tell us about?

Well, the 1950s just sort of moved along. There weren't too many things going on at that time. In the 1950s [we did start the May Queen tradition]. Around 1920 Mae Benner was the first president of the PTA, and in later years after Mae Benner died the girls decided it would be a nice tribute to her to have the "Mary Benner Silver Tea." Each year starting in 1951 we did this. [At] the first tea we chose a May Queen—that was Vickie Helms. We carried it on through many years until about 10 years ago and then stopped having the May Queen. It was always a little girl in the first grade. She was elected May Queen by popular vote of all the kids in school. They crowned her the queen, and then she reigned for a day. They had a very nice program to go along with it, and they also had a very nice silver tea. In the earlier days we had silver dollars. When you went to the tea you always put money in a little dish that they had. That was the way the PTA made their money.

Did you belong to the PTA?

Yes. Once I was the president.

Did anything happen in the 1960s you would like to tell me about?

In the 1960s Bill Marks was a county commissioner; he was the chairman of the board of county commissioners, and California was having a great many earthquakes. So one

day he decided that he was going to sit down and write Ronald Reagan a letter, which he did. Reagan was the governor of California at the time. So he wrote him a letter and it said, "Dear Governor Reagan: If you have any problems keeping your office in Sacramento, don't worry about it because we have a room in the Storey County Courthouse for you."

He sent the letter and never expected to hear from Reagan. But Reagan wrote back, thanked him very much and said, "Well, if I need to come, I'll come." [laughter]

Something happened to you in the 1960s that was rather nice. Would you like to tell us about that?

I had been doing a lot of work for the ambulances— going out at night, climbing hills and mountains to take people out of ravines and caring for them until we could get them to Carson City or Reno to a hospital. So the Storey County Volunteer Fire Department gave me a plaque in 1965. It said, "Margaret Marks, R.N., who symbolizes the lady with the lamp. From the Storey County Fire Department." I'm really proud of it. That was really great. But I think the greatest thing of all was that [in all those years] no one ever forgot to say, "Thank you."

Well, I would like to say thank you now, Mrs. Marks, for opening your home up to me and allowing me to interview you at your home in Virginia City, Nevada. Thank you very much.

Thank you very much, Ann.

PHOTOGRAPHS



Grave of Hosea Grosh, early comstock miner.



One of many crystal fixtures
in the Crystal Bar.



The Old Timers Club was a popular
meeting place for young people

Photographs by N.J. Broughton

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